



# 77 youths sexually exploited in Milwaukee over two years, report says

## Milwaukee Homicide Review Commission reviews incident reports; tally is probably low

By [Ashley Luthern](#) of the Journal Sentinel  
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A [first-of-its-kind report](#) puts the number of children who were sexually exploited in Milwaukee at 77 during two years — likely a gross underestimate, experts say.

"That 77 over a two-year period is just a fraction of the number of minors who have been sex-trafficked," said Claudine O'Leary of Rethink Resources, an organization that offers training to assist youths and adults who have been sexually exploited.

The Bob and Linda Davis Family Fund and the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare, both of which paid for the study, asked the Milwaukee Homicide Review Commission to estimate the number of youths exploited for human trafficking for sex.

The commission examined Milwaukee police incident reports from Aug. 1, 2010, to Aug. 1, 2012, that related to youths who as defined by state law were recruited or encouraged to take part in a commercial sex act or sexually explicit performance.

Child sex trafficking continues to be a big business in the state. Just over a week ago, [10 children in Wisconsin were recovered from child trafficking](#) and 100 suspects were arrested as part of a nationwide FBI investigation.

The new report was the first time a number has been placed on youths involved in sex trafficking in the city.

"This report solidifies that this is happening in Milwaukee and happening to our youth," said Erin M. Perkins, coordinator of the Milwaukee Commission on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault.

"It's a really critical resource to have because data is so, so limited around human trafficking, especially community-specific data."

Key findings from the study include:

- The overwhelming majority — 92% — were female.
- Nearly 70% of the youths had been reported missing to Milwaukee police at least once.

- About 29% of youths had been sexually assaulted, most by non-caregivers.
- The racial makeup of the youths identified was 7% black, 1% white, 3% Latino and 1% Indian.

The study was admittedly limited, taking information only from Milwaukee police reports. It did not include any ongoing cases or any of the federally investigated or federally prosecuted sex trafficking cases, such as the case of [Ronald Lee ilbert and Brandon A. Pratchet](#) .

ilbert picked up a 1-year-old girl in January 2012 and took her to a Milwaukee hotel, where Pratchet paid 100 and an amplifier for her. Pratchet then prostituted her using online ads. Both were found guilty in connection with the case.

There are easily a dozen more pending cases involving pimps like them who trafficked children, Milwaukee police Detective Lynda Stott said.

The numbers are hard to track. Sex trafficking is often misreported to law enforcement or social service providers as a battery or domestic violence incident, Stott said.

But the recently released child sex trafficking report is a starting point and already has provided useful data, such as showing that many children who are trafficked had been reported missing before, Stott said.

"We're trying to create something new, a high-risk missing list," Stott said.

The department wants to flag missing children who have been reported missing for a long time, have been reported missing multiple times in the past or have a previous history of being sexually assaulted, Stott said.

O'Leary, an advocate for children and adults who have been trafficked, said 52 programs in Milwaukee completed a survey last year and stated they provide services for people who have been trafficked. Almost 0% of programs wanted more training, and 5% of programs reported working with at least one person who was involved in sex trafficking in the last year.

The survey, commissioned by the Human Trafficking Task Force of reater Milwaukee, can help create a more coordinated response to child and adult trafficking, O'Leary said.

In order to do that, it's also necessary to examine why child sex trafficking occurs, officials said.

"Traffickers find vulnerable youth, girls going to corner stores for dinner every night or girls that look vulnerable and offer them things they can't get at home," Perkins said. "A frightening uote I heard one trafficker say: 'If you promise these girls heaven, they'll follow you to hell.'"

Many times, traffickers try to form a relationship with the child, as a boyfriend or provider. If teens' basic needs, such as food, clothing and school supplies, are being met, they are less vulnerable, O'Leary said.

"There's just a desperate need for jobs for youth," she said. "The vast majority when they were approached, even those approached on a relationship level, still came out and were asked one main thing: Do you want to make money?"

Although the report found that children who were involved in sex trafficking were primarily black girls 12-17 years who resided on Milwaukee's north side, it also noted the children were from 2 IP codes. The majority, 79%, resided in Milwaukee, but other areas — such as Oak Creek, Racine, Janesville, Brown Deer and Chicago — were represented.

"The report really is just a start," O'Leary said. "There is much more work to be done."

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